



**FEMA**

*Austin Joint Field Office*

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DR-4332-TX

FAQ-006



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## HURRICANE HARVEY

# FAQ

### Addressing Potentially Fraudulent Registration Due to Identity Theft

#### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q1: What should disaster survivors who did not apply for disaster assistance do if they suspect that they are a victim of disaster fraud?**

A1: To report disaster fraud, survivors can email FEMA's Office of the Chief Security Officer (OCSO) Tip line at [FEMA-OCSO-Tipline@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-OCSO-Tipline@fema.dhs.gov).

**Q2: If I was a victim of disaster fraud, and do not need disaster assistance, how do I cancel the application/notify FEMA?**

A2: Individuals should contact the FEMA Helpline at (800) 621-3362 to advise that they have not previously registered for FEMA assistance, and do not wish to register. They will not need to take further action. The original application will be locked to maintain a record of the potentially fraudulent file.

**Q3: If I was a victim of disaster fraud, but I still need to apply for assistance, what should I do?**

A3: Survivors and other individuals should contact the FEMA Helpline at (800) 621-3362 to advise that they had not previously registered for FEMA assistance, and that they wish to register. The case will be referred to DHS OIG.

**Q4: If I tried to apply, but the system said I have already applied, what should I do?**

A4: Contact FEMA's Helpline at (800) 621-3362.

**Q5: Will I need to wait until the investigation is complete, before I can register for assistance?**

A5: No. FEMA does not need to complete the investigation before survivors can have their new registrations taken. However, FEMA will need to verify the individual's identity.

### **If Asked...**

#### **Q6: When did FEMA become aware of this issue?**

A6: On September 29, 2017, FEMA learned potential identity theft may be occurring for a number of disaster applicants affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, and later the California Wildfires.

#### **Q7: How many survivors are potentially affected?**

A7: FEMA is still assessing the scope of people affected, but believes it is a small percentage of the overall number of applications received so far from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, and the California Wildfires that may be potentially involved in this situation.

#### **Q8: Have you informed survivors who may be affected?**

A8: FEMA has begun conducting outreach for the suspended registrations to notify applicants and begin the validation process.

#### **Q9: Why did FEMA wait to do notifications?**

A9: FEMA applied due diligence to ensure that as many eligible applicants as possible continue to receive needed assistance, while continuing to support an active criminal investigation. FEMA immediately instituted additional verifications and controls and suspended activity on potentially fraudulent accounts as information became available through the investigation. Applicants with concerns have been able to work with the FEMA Helpline (**800-621-3362**) to validate their registration information. In addition, FEMA amplified awareness messaging encouraging applicants to be alert for identity thieves who have tried to fraudulently apply for disaster assistance using stolen names, addresses and Social Security numbers and other scam artists taking advantage of disaster survivors looking for help.

#### **Q10: How did FEMA determine what was suspicious?**

A10: FEMA continues working with our partners in the DHS Office of Inspector General and FEMA Fraud and Internal Investigations Division to identify suspect cases and trends. As more information is validated through the investigation, it will be provided; however, at this time, this is an ongoing investigation.

#### **Q11: Is there any evidence that there was a compromise of FEMA data?**

A11: No. DHS and FEMA Security Operations Centers have conducted extensive reviews of the systems security logs and have found no indications of compromise.

### **News Releases and Information Already Disseminated**

General fraud messaging for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria was published in the following news releases between August 31 and September 29:

- [Hurricane Maria \(DR-4339-PR and DR-4340-USVI\)](#)
- [Hurricane Irma \(DR-4337-FL\)](#)
- [Hurricane Irma \(DR-4338-GA\)](#)
- [Hurricane Harvey \(DR-4332-TX\)](#)

Additional language was shared with the Joint Field Offices (JFOs) for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria during the week of October 9:

## **Avoid Disaster-Related Fraud and Scams**

Disaster responses often attract dishonesty and fraud. Survivors should guard against fraud and report suspicious activity from scam artists, identity thieves and other criminals.

Remember to protect yourself, and the people you care about, from disaster fraud. What should you do if:

- **You try to register for FEMA assistance online, but you receive a verification error.** You should call FEMA at **800-621-3362** to complete your registration with a FEMA representative who can tell you the reason for the verification error. If you suspect fraud, contact the Disaster Fraud Hotline at **866-720-5721**. You can also report fraud to the Federal Trade Commission at [www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov](http://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov).
- **You receive a call from someone asking to verify your FEMA registration, but you did not apply for FEMA assistance.** You may report the name and phone number of the person calling to the Disaster Fraud Hotline at **866-720-5721**. If you are unsure or uncomfortable with anyone you encounter claiming to be an emergency management official, do not give out personal information, and contact local law enforcement. All FEMA employees will have a FEMA Badge.
- **An inspector comes to your home without a FEMA photo ID.** Do not let someone in your home who claims to be a FEMA inspector but does not have a FEMA photo ID. Always ask to see a FEMA photo ID badge. A FEMA shirt or jacket is not proof of identity. All FEMA representatives, including our contracted inspectors, will have a laminated photo ID. If unsure, call FEMA at **800-621-3362 (FEMA)**.
- **Someone comes to your home to conduct an inspection, but asks for money before starting.** Federal and state workers do not ask for—or accept—money. FEMA representatives will never charge for disaster assistance, home inspections, or for help filling out applications. Stay alert for false promises to speed up the insurance, disaster assistance, or building permit process.

FEMA is fully cooperating with investigations into fraud. Visit [FEMA's Hurricane Maria Rumor Control page](#) to get the most accurate information from trusted sources.

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